

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MADRID

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1066

INFO AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

USCINCEUR

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LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PINT, SP

SUBJ: STATUS OF FRANCO'S HEALTH AND PROSPECTS

1. DESPITE PERSISTENT RUMORS OF RECENT SET-BACK IN  
FRANCO'S HEALTH, BEST INFORMATION BASED ON FRANCO'S  
RECENT PUBLIC PERFORMANCE AND PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

COMMENTS OF SOME FAMILY MEMBERS AND OF WELL  
PLACED GOS SOURCES IS THAT FRANCO IS CONTINUING TO  
FUNCTION THOUGH WITH NOCICEABLE DECLINE IN VIGOR. AMONG RECENT  
RUMORS ARE THAT FRANCO HAS BEEN SLOW IN RECOVERING FROM BOUT  
WITH FLU EARLY THIS YEAR, THAT THERE HAS BEEN TROUBLESOME  
RISE IN UREA CONTENT, AND, ACCORDING TO FRENCH AMBASSADOR,  
RENEWED REPORTS OF CANCER. DURING JANUARY AND SO FAR IN FEB,  
FRANCO HAS CONDUCTED REGULAR TUESDAY AUDIENCES FOR MILITARY  
OFFICERS AND WEDNESDAY AUDIENCES FOR CIVILIAN LEADERS. THERE  
WAS NOTICEABLE DECLINEIN NUMBER OF CALLERS NORMALLY RECEIVED IN  
AUDIENCE S DURING THIRD WEEK OF JANUARY, WHICH COINCIDED  
WITH PERIOD FRANCO BELIEVED TO HAVE HAD FLU, AND SINCE  
THAT TIME PUBLISHED NUMBER OF DELEGATIONS OR INDIVIDUALS  
RECEIVED BY FRANCO AT AUDIENCES HAS BEEN ABOUT ONE-THIRD  
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LOWER THAN IN PREVIOUS MONTHS. AUDIENCES HAVE REGULARLY

BEEN FOLLOWED BY USUAL PRESS PHOTO COVIGE SHOWING FRANCO ALERT AND IN REASONABLY GOOD CONDITION FOR 82-YEAR-OLD. FRANCO ALSO PRESIDED OVER LENGTHY COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING FEBRUARY 7 WHICH TOOK SEVERAL DIFFICULT DECISIONS, INCLUDING DESPATCH OF NAVAL UNITS TO CEUTA AND MELILLA AND STERN WARNING STATEMENT OF GOVT'S DETERMINATION TO MAINTAIN ORDER IN FACE OF CURRENT STRIKE WAVE.

2. WEEKEND PRESS CARRIED STATEMENT BY FRANCO'S SISTER, PILAR, TO EFFECT THAT HER BROTHER'S HEALTH WAS GOOD. SHE WAS QUOTED AS SPECULATING THAT PHLEBITIC CONDITION IN FRANCO'S THIGH MAY HAVE ORIGINATED DURING SALMON FISHING DURING FIRST PART OF 1974 WHEN HE RECEIVED SHARP BLOW ON RIGHT LEG FROM FISHING POLE. (SISTER'S COMMENTS TO PRESS CAME IN WAKE OF WAVE OF RUMORS THAT IN COMMENTS TO PRESS SOME TWO WEEKS BEFORE SHE HAD ADMITTED FRANCO'S HEALTH WAS FAILING, BUT THAT THESE COMMENTS HAD BEEN SUPRESSED IN PUBLISHED VERSION.)

3. FRANCO'S NEPHEW, NICOLAS FRANCO, TOLD EMBOFF FEB 10 THAT FRANCO HAS NO IMMEDIATE CRITICAL HEALTH PROBLEM OTHER THAN SLOW, STEADY DECLINE OF VIGOR THAT WOULD BE EXPECTED OF MAN GOING ON 83 YEARS OLD. HE ADDED THAT GENERALISMO NOW MORE FREQUENTLY PASSES UP STRENUOUS ACTIVITIES SUCH AS HUNTING PARTIES. NICOLAS FRANCO ADDED COMMENT THAT SEVERAL COMMENTS THAT HIS UNCLE HAD MADE RECENTLY IN PUBLIC AND IN PRIVATE STATEMENTS, AS WELL AS SOME CUSTOMARY ASSURANCES THAT GENERALISIMO HAD NOTICEBLY OMITTED TO MAKE, GAVE HIM IMPRESSION THAT CAUDILLO MAY BE CONSIDERING 1975 AS THE YEAR FOR HIS RELINQUISHMENT OF POWER. NICOLAS FRANCO ADDED AS PERSONAL OPINION THAT FALL OF 1975 WOULD BE LOGICAL TIME FOR TURNOVER PARTIALLY OR ENTIRELY OF CHIEF OF STATE FUNCTIONS TO JUAN CARLOS, SINCE IT WOULD FIT IN IDEALLY WITH INAUGURATION OF NEWLY ELECTED CORTES AND BEGINNING OF NEW POLITICAL YEAR FOLLOWING SUMMER BREAK. NICOLAS FRANCO, IN THIS CONNECTION, NOTED THAT PRINCE JUAN CARLOS HAD COOCHED TO HIM AND TO THREE OTHER CLOSE ASSOCIATES THAT HE WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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CONCERNED OVER THE ABSENCE OF ANY STAFF PREPARATIONS BY THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE SUCCESSION AND HAD ASKED HIM AND HIS OTHER CONFIDANTS FOR THEIR SUGGESTIONS AS TO SEQUENCE OF STEPS THAT SHOULD BE PLANNED TO MAKE TURNOVER SMOOTH AND UNTRAUMATIC.

4. AIDE TO PRIME MINISTER AIRAS TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE KNEW OF NO CURRENT, SPECIFIC CRITICAL HEALTH PROBLEM

FACING FRANCO OTHER THAN STEADY ADVANCE AGAING PROCESS,  
ADDING THAT PRIME MINISTER HAD NOTED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS  
THAT CAUDILLO DEFINITELY HAS "GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS".  
HE COMMENTED THAT, AS IS FREQUENTLY CASE WITH 83 YEAR  
OLD MEN, ON CAUDILLOS' "BAD DAYS" HESEAY RISE RELATIVELY  
LATE OR CURTAILS SOME DAYS ACTIVITIES BECAUSE OF  
FATIGUE. HE SUSPECTED THAT REPORTS OF THESE "BAD DAYS"  
FROM TIME TO TIME FILTER OUT AND THAT EXAGGERATION  
OF THEIR SERIOUSNESS COULD EASILY HAVE LED TO RUMORS  
THIS TIME AS IN PAST OF SOME HEALTH CRISIS.

5. DR. CASTRO FARINAS, CARDIO-VASCULAR SPECIALIST AND  
ONE OF TEAM OF PHYSICIANS ATTENDING FRANCO SINCE SUMMER  
HEALTH CRISIS, TOLD AIR ATTACHE ON FEB 2 AND AGAIN  
ON FEB 7 THAT THRONBO-FLEBITIC CONDITION IN  
FRANCO'S LEG HAS NOT REURRED AND THAT HE UNAWARE OF ANY  
OTHER SERIOUS ILLNESS AFFECTING FRANCO AT THIS TIME.  
IN MORE RECENT REPORT, HOWEVER, EYE WITNESS AT FRANCO'S  
REGULAR FEB 12 AUDIENCE WITH CIVILIAN LEADERS  
REPORTED THAT FRANCO LOOKED UNUSUALLY TIRED AND LISTLESS,  
CONDITION HE UNDERSTOOD HAS EXISTED SINCE LAST  
FRIDAY'S STRENUOUS CABINET MEETING. FRANCO SAW ONLY  
FIVE GROUPS AT FEB 12 AUDIENCE, ONLY ABOUT ONE-  
THIRD AVERAGE NUMBER OF TWO MONTHS AGO, BUT HE SHOWED  
NO UNUSUAL DETERIORATION IN PRESS PHOTO COVERAGE. ON  
FEB 13 FRANCO RECEIVED CREDENTIALS OF NEW AMBASSADORS  
AT REGULAR CEREMONIES AT ROYAL PALACE WITH NO DIFFICULTIES  
APPARENT.

6. THIS GENERAL IMPRESSION OF DECLINING VIGOR AND  
SHORTENED WORKING HOURS IS WIDELY SHARED AMONG INFORMED  
SOURCES IN UPPER LEVELS OF SPANISH GOVERNMENT, THOUGH  
INDICATIONS ARE THAT FRANCO CONTINUES TO KEEP FAIRLY  
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REGULAR SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS WITH DIFFERENT  
MINISTERS AND OTHER KEY GOVERNMENT FIGURES AND TO MAKE  
DECISIONS ON MAJOR ISSUES,ALTHOUGH WITH WHAT APPEARS  
TO BE EVEN MORE DELIBERATE PACE THAN IN PAST.

7. EVEN SO, ALTHOUGH FRANCO MAINTAINING CONTROL WITH  
DIMINISHED VIGOR, GROWING PUBLIC IMPRESSION IS THAT HIS  
GRIP HAS SLIPPED SIGNIFICANTLY AND THAT HIS DEPARTURE  
BY EITHER DEATH OR RETIREMENT IS IMMINENT. THIS PUBLIC  
IMPRESSION, THOUGH PERHAPS NOT SOLIDLY BASED ON FACTS,  
IS IN ITSELF POLITICAL REALITY THAT CONTRIBUTES TO  
CURRENT POLITICAL EFFERVESCENCE IN SPAIN AND TO GROWTH  
OF FEELING THAT AUTHORITY OF FRANCO, AND BY IMPLICATION  
ARIAS GOVERNMENT IS SLIPPING AND THAT SOME CHANGE IS  
IMMINENT. GOVERNMENT OBVIOUSLY ANXIOUS TO COUNTERACT

ANY IMAGE OF DRIFT AND INDISION, AND PRECISELY THIS  
CONCERN IS REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN MAJOR MOTIVE IN  
FEB 7 CABINET DECISIONS TO ISSUE FIRM WARNING ON  
CHALLENGES TO PUBLIC ORDER AND TO ACT QUICKLY AND  
FORCEFULLY IN DESPATCHING NAVAL NAVAL UNITS FOR SHOW OF  
FORCE AT CEUTA AND MELILLA.

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## Message Attributes

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